# Our Faith

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Purpose: To preserve and strengthen the Christian essence of Unitarianism

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## From Beyond Calvary

CARL BIHLDORFF

(Minister, First Parish in Brookline, Mass.)

Children of earth and of God, think it not strange that I speak to your day. Calvary was but a milestone in my destiny. Though my spirit ascended beyond the reach of your thought, through the wonder of God's grace something of myself remains. Ofttimes I have mused how so fragile a thing—the seedlings my spirit planted in the hearts of a few friends—could survive. Yet I have seen them grow and mature and give birth to new seedlings.

Think not that I knew no moments of doubt. The whispers I heard from on high and declared as everlasting truth were then confirmed by faith. Now I know that my faith was fact. The realm to which you are bound by God's design is moral and spiritual. Freedom you have, even to transgress the commandments of our Father, but the consequences of your trespasses are more sure than the setting sun.

Many of you are weary of life, confused, distracted. May I ask why and suggest an answer? Is it not that you have tried to make life fit the cup of your desire? On my knees I prayed your prayer, yet ere the sun set on Gethsemane's slope, I let His will be fully mine. For though the earth giveth joy and pleasure, laughter and song, the soul's peace cometh from the Father. Children of earth and of God, let not the horizon of your life be bound by things temporal.

O children of light and darkness, I have beheld your search for the Father—in worship and prayer, ritual and sacrifice, mortification and confession; even doubt and denial are born of your quest. I have known the hunger that prompts your search. I know also how frugal is your fare. For you have forgotten my witness. God standeth not afar off waiting in the vast stillness to receive you unto Himself. He is the Great Shepherd whose loving-kindness seeketh out the lost, even your selves. He moveth now within your being, and the whispers of His yearning love you have heard times without number. But the Father's love beareth commandments. It is these you have denied. And without their fulfillment His love shall forever escape you. Hearken, therefore, to the commandments of His love, and do them. So shall you live and find peace unto your soul's desiring.

Children of earth and of heaven, the Father's Kingdom is not of the world but of the spirit. Transient is the garment that clothes your spirit, and the garden wherein you walk. These things you know, and yet your hearts cling to earth—as though it were the Kingdom. Lift up your eyes unto the hills and beyond and know that that which endureth is of the spirit. Rejoice in this faith which my life hath confirmed, and with heart and mind and soul and strength love the Lord, thy God.

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## Immortality

HAZEL ROGERS GREDLER

(Unitarian Minister, Barnstable, Mass.)

*The low-hung clouds, bereft and stark,*
*Lie thick across a darkening sky;*
*While, gaunt and still, there stands a cross*
*Etched clear, in fleeting light on high.*

*With head bent low in deepest grief,*
*The mother Mary homeward turns,*
*Despite her pain, she calls to mind*
*Sweet memories that bless and burn.*

*Her son had loved such simple things!*
*The graceful birch, the song of bird,*
*The crimson tulip by the wall,*
*The bleat of lambs, so often heard.*

*And as he came to manhood's prime,*
*He saw not only stars and earth;*
*His heart of love, his hands of help*
*Became a symbol of new birth.*

## A Rich Mine of Devotion

Our readers will be glad to know that *Unitarian Faith in Unitarian Hymns* described by a writer in our October issue as "a rich mine of Unitarian devotion" and as "just the thing" for Sunday School prizes to Junior High students, is now available again.

First published in 1918, a new and revised edition was issued in 1949 edited by Dr. Mortimer Rowe, for many years Secretary of the British General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

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## The Immortal Hope

HENRY HALLAM SAUNDERSON

Within the fellowship of the Christian Church, there are people who hold the most widely divergent views on the subject of personal immortality. These views range all the way from frank negation to the most ardent affirmation. As a doctrine of the Church, this faith has shown great vigor and vitality, for it has not only traveled through the centuries to the present time, but has carried the heavy burden of the belief that the human body must be raised from the dead. Happily there are multitudes of Christian people today in whose minds this physical load is definitely laid aside, and the faith in immortality is allowed to spread its wings with its full vigor.

Whatever people believe today about immortality, we should recognize the historical fact that it was a highly essential part of the faith with which the early Church confronted the world. Everything that the messengers of the Church knew about the life of Jesus, and his ardent championship of humanity, was preached; but their major topic was the story of the immortal spirit of the Master, and their conviction that he lived eternally. And, in the light of that faith, they asserted immortality for those who kept valiantly the faith of Jesus.

Instead of this emphasis on a future world making them heedless of this present world and human life within it, it had the opposite effect. One, who observed widely the life and faith of the early Christians, saw in it a tremendous moral dynamic. He said, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifieth himself." It exalted greatly their appreciation of that sense of human values which Jesus had preached; and it impelled them to heroic deeds in building a new social order in the nations of that changing time.

Today, men who differ widely in their views on this subject may find themselves in agreement on a new assertion of the faith of Jesus in the worth of human personality. That emphasis may prove the lifting power which brings us to that higher life where we are free from all the dread of death, and where we dare greatly to believe that human life may be deathless in its quality; and therefore endless in its duration.

## A Prayer For Easter

*Almighty Father, the source of life and of light: we lift up our hearts to thee in gratitude and in petition. We offer thee our gratitude for thy gifts and we bring unto thee our petition for wisdom and courage to use rightly the precious realities which thou hast bestowed upon us. Thou hast given us thy gift of life, for which we did not ask. But thou hast put before us a choice of ways which, in our life, we may follow.*

*In the most venturesome hours of our faith we have dared to believe that here and now we deal with eternal values, and we pray that we may have the wisdom to choose those values, and courage to live for them. When we rise above our clouds of doubt we see that goodness is eternal, that integrity is everlasting, that truth is imperishable.*

*Help us then, O Father, to fill our daily life with the realities that are everlasting. So shall we live, in the midst of time, the life which is eternal. Keep us ever loyal to thee that we may fulfill, on earth, thy divine purpose; that we may live as those who know themselves to be the children of God.*

*On this glad Easter day may we rise above the fear that death is the end of our life. As the light of the dawn has advanced into the full light of day, so may our vision of life everlasting advance to the fullness of a radiant faith. And, in the time that is to come, may we hold that faith with unfaltering courage. So shall we live as disciples of our Master who has revealed to the eyes of men the power of an endless life. Amen.*

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## A Letter from Wales

I have been so interested in OUR FAITH that I am moved to write you, stating my own viewpoint. I agree that a Unitarian church is essentially a *church*, where the worship of God is so emphatic and the conception of God so clear and personal that no atheist or agnostic would feel at home there unless his atheism

were tinged with doubt, or his agnosticism reverent—unless, in short, he wanted to be able to accept theism and worship God.

The Unitarian church is the only society so nebulous in its viewpoint that it seeks to include everybody. And that inevitably means satisfying nobody. If you join a socialist society it is taken for granted that you believe in socialism. Once you reject or even doubt socialism you leave that society. So too with a conservative or a spiritualistic society or with any other society whatever—except the Unitarian church! Let us call a halt to this vagueness. Let us not put the means (freedom) before the end (the discovery of the real being of God). Let us be definitely and emphatically and evangelically *theistic!*

But I submit that to promote the theistic emphasis in our movement is not necessarily the same as to promote the Christian emphasis.

If the criterion of being a Christian is the acceptance of what Jesus taught, we have to face the fact that various people interpret the teaching of Jesus in various ways. I personally believe that Jesus was a pure theist, and because I so believe, I am prepared to call myself a Christian. But were it proved to me that Jesus was not a pure theist, and that Jesus believed, for instance, in providential preference for Jews, and in eternal torment, I could no longer accept him as Master and call myself a Christian.

So let us not shut out of the Unitarian fold those who, though they do not believe that Jesus was a pure theist, are themselves pure theists, believing, like Frances Cobbe, in the three essentials: God, personal immortality, and world brotherhood.

BASIL VINEY
Unitarian Minister, Swansea, Wales

(*Editors' Note.* The Unitarian Christian Fellowship, in cherishing the "Christian essence" of Unitarianism, intend primarily to indicate that Unitarianism is to be understood as a liberal expression of Christianity and not a new twentieth-century religion without roots in the Christian tradition. The U.C.F. does not stand for any specific interpretation of the teachings of Jesus, but holds fast to Jesus as their most vital source of inspiration.)

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## Report of an Address

At the January meeting of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship at the Second Church in Boston, in the course of an address on the subject "An Outsider Looks In," I submitted "five points" of positive suggestions.

These suggestions are those which, I believe, would, if adopted by the Unitarian Christian Fellowship, serve as a basis for a positive program for theists, lay and clerical, within our denomination. It would not be interpreted as divisive because the "evangelism" of its purposes would help to stimulate the advance of the Unitarian movement.

In this Anniversary Year such a statement would symbolize a new spirit of constructive vitality for all who are at heart affiliates with the theistic tradition in our denomination.

(I) The Advance of our denomination by all who place emphasis upon the essentials of Jesus' faith, both theistic and ethical.

(II) The Evangelism of this faith to all who are today confused by sectarian division of the Christian religious culture in which we find ourselves.

(III) The Offering of a non-sectarian creedless faith in God and Jesus of Nazareth, founder of a Universal Religion which by nature is greater than any of our present institutional expressions, including orthodox Christianity.

(IV) The Reconciliation by means of the Unitarian Christian attitude, of seemingly opposing factions within our denomination, in order that a united advance may be made possible.

(V) The Re-emphasis upon the "free mind principle" within the historical objectives found in the by-laws of the American Unitarian Association giving priority to belief in God, according to the individual's understanding, and the leadership of Jesus in his service to mankind.

I am assuming that the diversity we prize within Unitarianism does not rule out a fellowship of kindred minds, meeting and working to foster the faith which its members hold in common.

HEINZ RETTIG
(Unitarian Minister, Newburyport. Mass.)

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## Sperry on Humanism and Christianity

"Modern humanism, prompted by the realization that God has withdrawn so far into the mysteries of time and place that we can no longer find Him, has made a virtue of being thrown back on its own resources. Its faith is that of the crew of a ship which the captain has deserted."

"*Christianity requires God and two men.* The love of God and the love of neighbor demand each other for fulfillment. These two

are never as well balanced as they ought to be. Our present temptation is to make the second equivalent to the whole of religion. *We are tempted to let the traditional substance of the Christian faith go by the board, and save only the Christian ethic. One can only say of that attempt that thus far it has not succeeded, for the last forty years have been filled with tragic moral failures.* It is therefore not enough to say: 'All ye are brethren.' That proposition is not self-evident and self-vindicating. Apparently one has to have the *full statement*: *'One is your Father, and all ye are brethren.'* " —Dean Willard L. Sperry, in *Bangor Daily News.*

(Reprinted from *A Lenten Manual for 1950, One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Unitarian Christianity,* compiled by J. Ernest Bryant, West Brooksville, Me.)

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## The Power of Personality

But you say, how could a perfect personal life lived so many years ago, of which we have only a few scanty records enter so significantly into my life? My answer is that that is a mystery which I cannot explain; but it is none the less a fact for being a mystery. It is the mystery of the personality of Jesus, the mystery of his significance in the counsels of God for the soul of man. Of any *ordinary* historical figure the fact that he lived so many years ago, the fact that the records we have are so meagre, would make him irrelevant, and increasingly irrelevant as the years pass, to our modern life.

But it is precisely the proof that there is something not ordinary about Jesus, that, all down the ages and just as much in our own age as in any earlier, he has been able to lay hold of those who seek to centre their inner life in him, and gradually lift them to something which, the more it is realised, the more it is seen to be what we cannot call any other thing but just Christlike. It must be that somehow there is realised and expressed in him the underlying Divine purpose in human history which never changes from age to age; scanty records do not matter; so long as there is enough for the tremendous surety and power of his personality to shine through.

(Reprinted from a King's Chapel lecture, *God and Modern Man,* by HERBERT H. FARMER, Professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster College, Cambridge University.)

## Our Christian Treasury

"The word 'Christian' is the casket which holds for human thought the supreme treasures of the inner life of man, and the most precious gems of his external civilization; and when all has been emptied out from it which false zeal and mistaken piety have stored there for safe keeping, there yet remains in the catholic genius of the religion, the richest historic deposit with which Providence has blessed the world. To part with that word, and throw ourselves upon philosophy to weave us a substitute, would be to interrupt the Past in its creation of the Future, and not only to migrate to unreclaimed countries, but to sink the old native land that we might do so."

JAMES MARTINEAU

(From an essay, "The New Affinities of Faith," in *Essays, Reviews, and Addresses,* vol. II, p. 250)

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## Events

Dr. Preston Bradley, minister of the People's Church, Chicago, will be the speaker at the Unitarian Christian Fellowship's Anniversary Week supper on Wednesday, May 24, at Arlington Street Church, Boston.

Dr. George H. Williams will deliver the last of his weekly Lowell Institute lectures at King's Chapel, Boston, on Monday afternoon, April 3, at 2.30, when his subject will be "Denominations and Democracy."

Dr. Herbert H. Farmer, professor of divinity in the University of Cambridge, is concurrently delivering the Gifford lectures at Glasgow. His general subject is, "Incarnation and Religion: A Theological Study of Religious Types."

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## Change of Name

Beginning next month, the name of this publication will be changed to *The Unitarian Christian.*

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Articles for publication in OUR FAITH are welcome from all who wish to use these columns to express Unitarian Christianity.